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ABSTRACT

This handbook is intended to help communities (particularly, but not exclusively, in Pennsylvania) develop adopt-a-school partnerships between local schools and businesses. Advantages of partnerships for both schools and their potential business partner are reviewed, and brief profiles of possible cooperative projects (many of which have already been attempted in Pennsylvania) are presented. Then, suggestions are given for obtaining sponsorship and funding, coordinating the program, and identifying potential business partners. A checklist outlining steps in the development cycle of a partnership and advice on encouraging program expansion are provided. Finally, for those seeking resource materials and/or information about workshops, addresses of educational agencies and organizations in Pennsylvania are listed. (KH)

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Partnerships in Education

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A Handbook

Developed jointly by the Pennsylvania Department of Education,
the Governor's Private Sector Initiatives Task Force,
the Allegheny Conference Education Fund and
the Public Education Fund

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This handbook is a joint effort of the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the Governor's Private Sector Initiatives Task Force, the Allegheny Conference Education Fund and the Public Education Fund.

Partnerships in Education: An Introduction

Partnerships in Education programs link participating companies or organizations with individual schools, encouraging each pair to develop its own cooperative relationship.

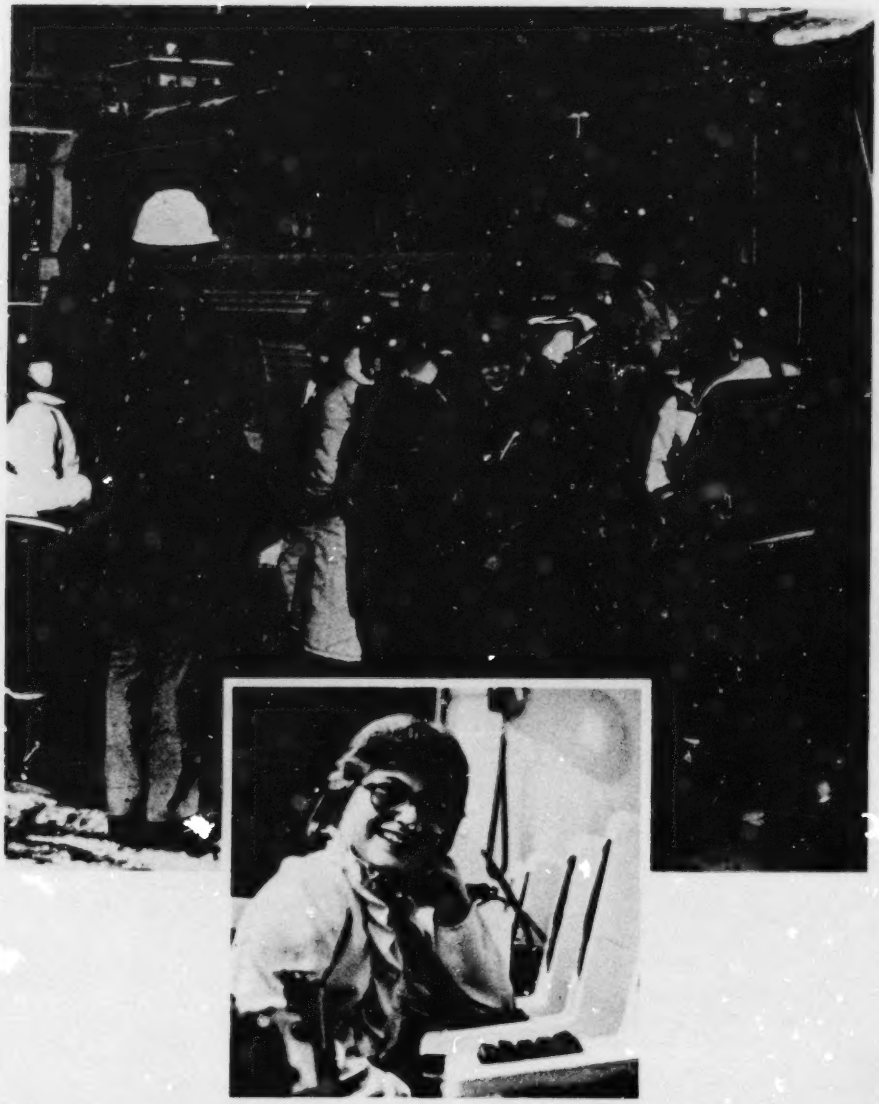
Partnerships—often referred to as adopt-a-school programs—are just one of many ways to encourage greater business and community involvement in support of the public schools. The creation of independent, supportive education funds, the establishment of small grants for teachers programs and sponsorship of community seminars on educational issues are other ways of sparking involvement.

Partnerships are attractive, however, because of their simplicity and flexibility. Individual schools and their community partners develop activities at their own pace, consistent with their needs and resources. One-to-one pairing with a single school enables businesses or community organizations to support improvements in public education in a concrete and manageable way.

Corporations, local businesses, retail stores, community organizations, service clubs and trade/agricultural associations can all be effective community partners. This handbook frequently mentions "companies" or "businesses" because school-company pairings have served as the basis for many partnership programs. Business references, however, should be seen as applicable to any community partner.

Joint curriculum development, field trips, classroom speakers, tutoring arrangements, internships and career awareness seminars are just a few of the possible projects that community partners and schools can undertake together. Through the cumulative effect of many such cooperative efforts, a partnership can improve the educational environment at a school. The program as a whole may then serve as the basis for expanded community/school cooperation across the entire district.

This handbook is intended to help communities without a partnership program to get one started and to share insights with districts where programs are already underway. It draws on the experience of the Allegheny Conference Education Fund in Pittsburgh and many other programs throughout Pennsylvania and across the country. Partnership programs have been successful in urban, suburban and rural communities, operating through many different organizational models.



"We go new places and try new things. You see what working is really like."

The School Perspective

A school-community partnership can provide many benefits for a school, but most importantly, it serves as a simple mechanism for bringing the "outside" world directly into contact with principals, teachers and students themselves. This outside contact means a broader audience for positive school efforts, an exchange of new ideas, a better understanding of other viewpoints and the chance to be better understood. It can also offer contacts to draw on in meeting future needs and an opportunity to make the educational process more relevant to the world of work.

For students, in particular, outside contact can lead to increased motivation to stay in school and greater awareness of work-world opportunities and expectations.

The need for outside contact and support is important for districts as well as for individual schools. Most public school systems directly serve only a small percentage of the households in their respective communities. A partnership program can have the most impact as part of a larger strategy for reducing the isolation of the schools from the broader community and for increasing public awareness of what the school system has to offer. (Page 12 of this handbook suggests some ways you might want to build on a partnership program.)

The Business/Community Perspective

"Outside contact" is an important part of what businesses gain from partnerships, as well. Businesses can become isolated, too—so a broader vision on the part of employees can be a real asset to a corporation, particularly as companies are expected to be more and more sensitive to the views of the larger community.

Businesses also recognize that public schools determine, in large measure, the quality of future employee talent. This, too, grows increasingly important as the broader skills of reading, mathematics and critical thinking emerge as the best assurance of adaptability in a rapidly changing world.

Most significant for business, however, is the link between the public schools and the vitality of a community or region. Declining schools can mean a declining community. But good schools help make a region an attractive and economically healthy place to live.

A Partnership Sampler

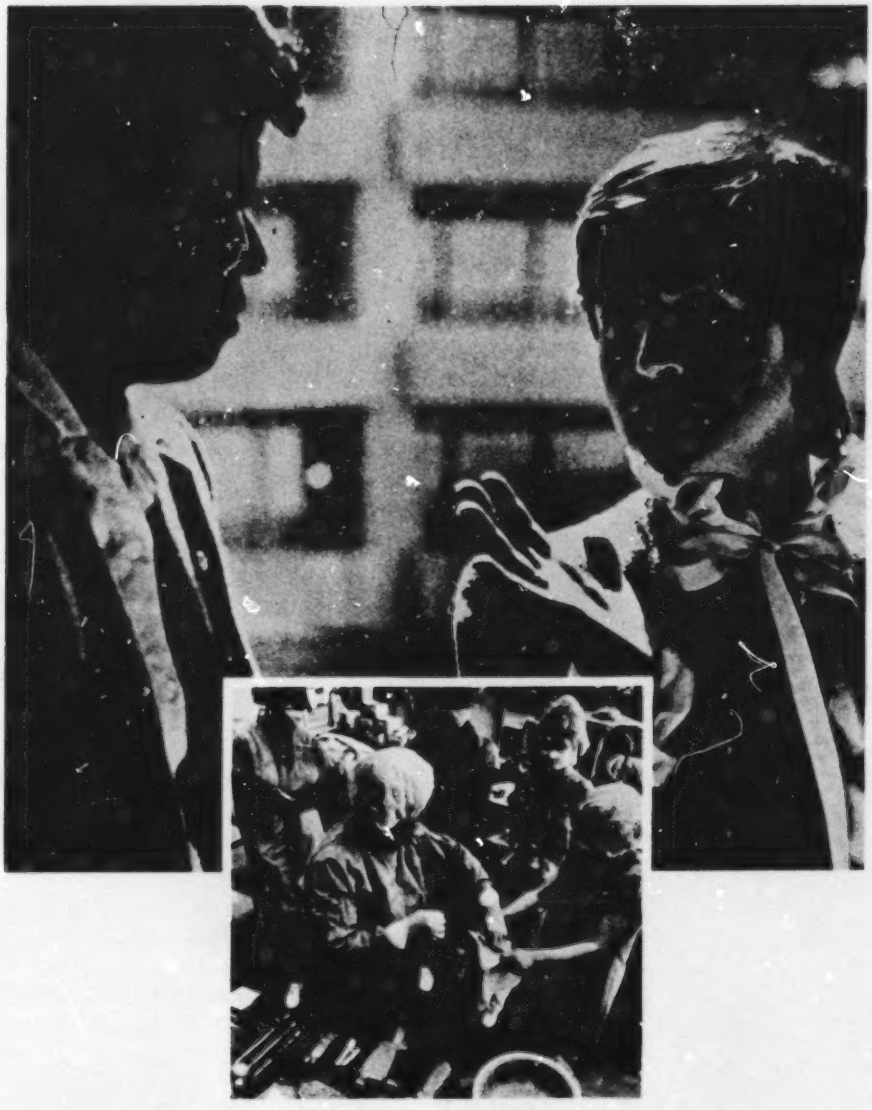
Each school-business pair develops its own range of cooperative projects—some on a small scale, some more extensive. These activities, however, should be seen not as one-time efforts, but as part of an ongoing cooperative relationship. Mature partnerships seek to emphasize staff, curriculum and student development initiatives, rather than more token involvement such as community donation of prizes for student contests.

Here's a sampling of activities carried out in partnership programs throughout Pennsylvania:

2,000 Pounds of Paper! One partnership company found itself with a ton—literally—of surplus paper. Now a high school is putting it to use for art projects, computer flow charting and dozens of other activities. Other partnerships have made good use of old or unwanted company equipment.

A Student Enters Civic Affairs Through the efforts of a retailer paired with a nearby school, the student government president has been made a working member of the local community council.

On the Job Partnerships have placed students in on-the-job work-study positions in drafting, word processing, government affairs and many other fields.



"The school coordinator and I meet regularly to plan joint activities. She's great to work with and we've become close friends."

Liebe Hilda, Middle school students have established pen-pal relationships in Germany, France and Mexico through a multinational partner's foreign divisions. In another school, a partner underwrote the cost of American Field Service placements.

Secretary's Day Clerical students "shadowed" secretaries at a school's corporate partner on Secretary's Day. Systems as varied as the Pittsburgh and West Chester School Districts have had much success with "shadow day" programs in many career areas.

Building a Bookstore and Technical Library In two separate partnership projects, company employees have donated paperbacks for a bookstore and have saved their technical journals for use by students.

The College Connection Schools have drawn on college or university partners for assistance with curriculum development in areas as diverse as art and foreign languages. Also, businesses have sponsored high-school students selected to take summer courses at area campuses.

Shop Safety in the Work World A visit from a plant safety specialist helped to make safety issues real to 9th grade industrial arts classes.

Front Row Seats One high school provided complimentary tickets for its student theatre production to company employees active in the partnership.

Sharpening Job Hunting Skills Company representatives have given graduating seniors presentations on job search skills, helped them to write resumes and fill out sample applications, and then conducted mock job interviews with student volunteers. One partnership at the elementary school level fostered early career awareness by arranging for students to apply for "jobs" around the school and at business locations. The students earned credits toward donated items at the school store.

Computers Round the Clock One rural school shares computer equipment with several local companies. Housed at the school, the unit is available for students until 3:00 p.m. Businesses use the computer all evening and night—and rent it out during the summer.

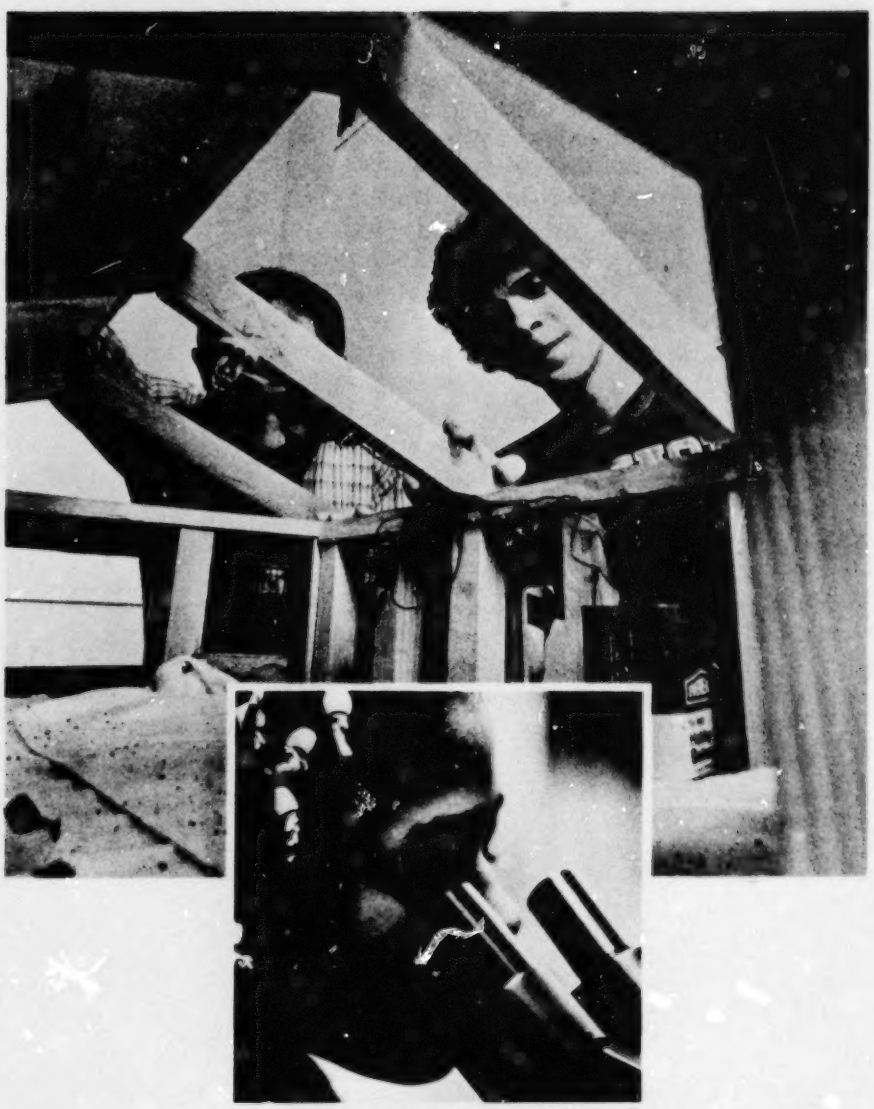
Lights...Camera...Training One partnership has worked with a local company to secure cable channel access for training and employment programs.

Tours: From Coal Barges to Computers Companies have sponsored visits to barge-building facilities, a radio station, construction sites, a computer facility and many other locations.

Meeting the Press Student reporters interviewed a company plant manager for a story in the school paper. Later, a representative from the corporation's public relations office came to talk with the class about company communications.

Employee Tutors A number of partnerships have involved current or retired company volunteers in reading, math and science tutoring programs.

Teachers as Shadows Opportunities for teacher "shadow days" have proved so successful that one district is helping to expand the program. A limited number of specially-selected teachers are now awarded a day of paid release-time to follow employees through a day on the job in an area of interest. The results? Improved teacher morale, direct transfer of work-world experience to the classroom, and improved school / community relations.



"Our partnership is great! The company has provided speakers, arranged tours and even donated materials and equipment."

Starting Your Program

Sponsorship

To get a program started, you need three elements: support from businesses or community organizations, support from the schools and some source of momentum to keep the effort moving forward

The first step is to discuss the partnership concept informally with the superintendent of schools and then with potential business or community sponsors. (Small districts might consider planning a multi-district program.)

Across the country, local chambers of commerce have been very receptive and have often served as effective program sponsors, providing a good point of contact for establishing partnerships with specific businesses. Rotaries, service clubs and farm or retail associations can also be good initial points of contact. If no such organization exists in your area, you might begin discussions with leaders in several local companies whose involvement could ultimately lead to participation by the broader business community. (It would be possible, in fact, to begin a demonstration project with cooperation between a single business and one school.)

If your district's service area doesn't include any large companies, you might try contacting companies or organizations with an *interest* in your area. Also, partnerships can be formed with small businesses, retail stores, the media, or nonprofit community organizations. What you're looking for are opportunities to bring the experience of the working world into the classroom. Also, partnerships programs aren't the only way to encourage community involvement with the schools. Another possible starting point is the creation of a program of small grants to teachers for the purpose of carrying out innovative projects with their students. (A handbook on "Small Grants for Teachers," like this one on partnerships, is also available. See page 13.)

If there is sufficient enthusiasm on the part of a local business or service group and on the part of the schools, their informal agreement to serve as sponsors may be enough to get your program going. Sometimes, though, the schools may find it difficult to take the lead in establishing the program because they may be perceived as looking for business handouts. The initial efforts of a business organization, on the other hand, may be distrusted by the schools. In other cases, it just takes additional resources or motivation to get things started. For all of these reasons, the assistance of a third sponsor, trusted by both sides, may be helpful.

In Pittsburgh, for instance, the partnership program is jointly sponsored by the public schools, the Greater Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce and the Allegheny Conference on Community Development. The Conference, by virtue of its own business constituency and its support for public education in a number of program areas, was in a good position to provide initial leadership.

Whether you work with two or with more sponsors, it's important to get top-level support from both the schools and the business community, along with any additional assistance needed to bring these groups together and to spark action. Once you've determined the preliminary interest of your sponsors, you can move toward a more formal agreement outlining program goals and the responsibilities of the various parties.

Funding

In your initial discussions, one of the most frequently raised questions will be that of funding: What will it take to support the program and who will provide that support?

"What the community contributes most is a fresh perspective—an immediate connection with the world beyond the school."

Depending on the number of partnerships involved, the major administrative cost is likely to be a full or part-time program coordinator to oversee the program and to nurture partnerships. This position, however, can sometimes be filled by a parent volunteer or an employee on loan from a supportive business organization, provided that he or she can devote substantial energy to the program and is capable of building trusting relationships with both school and community partners. Other needs include clerical services, office space, postage, phone, transportation allowance and a small budget for printing. Many of these may also be supplied as community donations, so operating expenses can be minimal.

Support can come from a variety of sources. For instance, the schools may supply office space and clerical support, with a business organization raising foundation and corporate support to cover the coordinator's salary. In some cases, school districts have paid for the program entirely on their own or have shared costs among districts. Alternatively, a parent group or community organization may provide funding or staff.

Whatever funding arrangement you adopt, one of the program's primary attractions is its manageability. Once provision has been made for a program coordinator, the program can begin at a very low administrative cost. Keeping the budget to a minimum ensures that community contributions go directly to programs at partnership schools.

Program Coordination

Once your program has been established, the coordinator serves as its primary spokesperson, presenting the partnership idea to interested companies, participating schools and, when appropriate, to the community at large. Also, as individual partnerships are formed, he or she will need to serve as the facilitator for each school-business relationship. Initially, this will require setting up meetings, fostering understanding between the designated business and school coordinators, providing guidance and program ideas and helping to smooth administrative difficulties that arise at either the business or the school.

In Pittsburgh, it has proved helpful to house the coordinator in a business setting, outside the school system. This positions him or her as an independent, professional liaison. In Lancaster, the coordinator is a school employee who operates from a district office.

Ideally, the program coordinator should be energetic and imaginative, with strong administrative and communications skills plus the sensitivity needed to help potentially mistrustful groups work effectively together. That's a lot to expect of one person. But the success of your program will rest with the abilities of this individual as much as with any other factor, so it's critical to find the right person for the job.

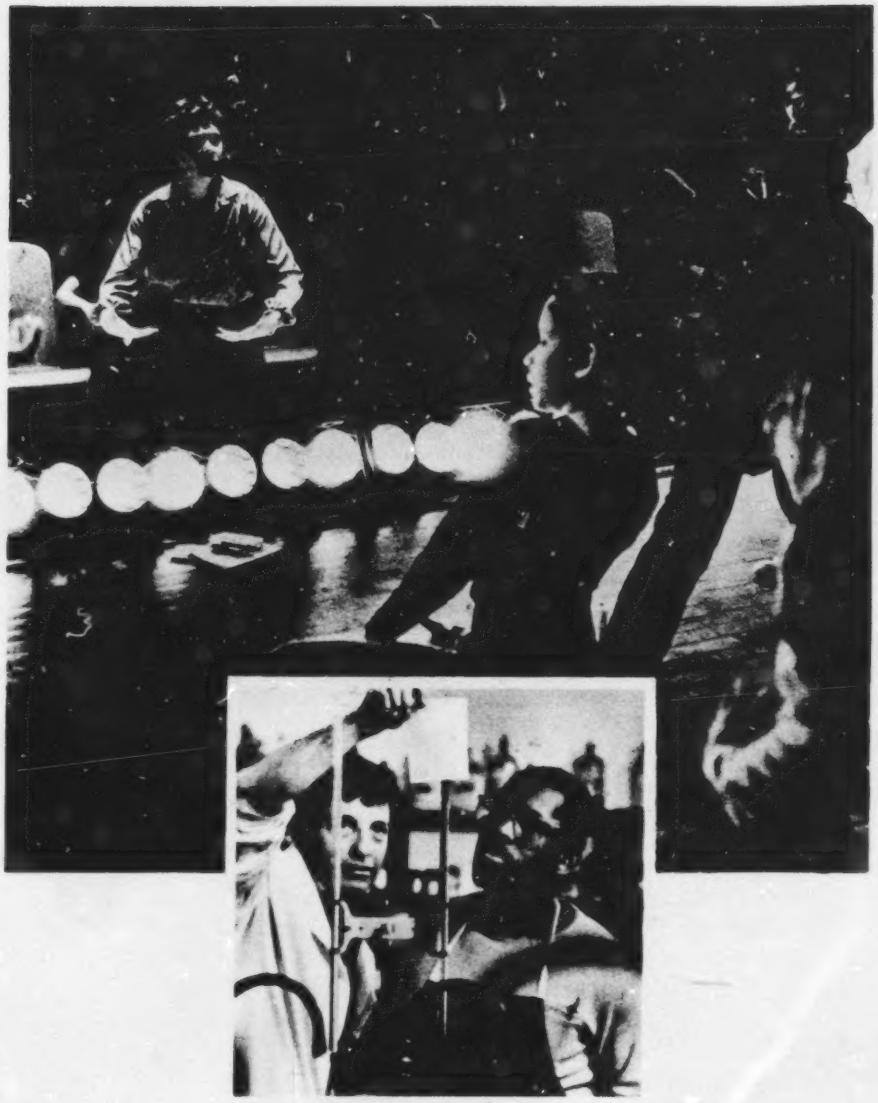
Identifying Partners

Once you've made arrangements for sponsorship, funding and program coordination, the task of initiating individual partnerships begins.

While laying the groundwork for the program, you will probably have discovered a number of businesses or community organizations interested in forming partnerships with schools in your district. At this point, the partnership coordinator should talk seriously with your contacts at one or two interested, or potentially interested, companies.

In the process of identifying potential partners, you may find businesses—but more likely, institutions or nonprofit groups—with resources more appropriate for use across the entire system than by a single school. These "associate partners" might include museums, art groups, a local advertising club, nonprofit agencies, colleges or universities. They can operate flexibly, working with the program coordinator as needed, and can make substantial contributions.

Developing one-to-one relationships between companies and schools, however, is the heart of the partnership program. This alone provides the ongoing, outside contact which can be so important to administrators, staff and students at an individual school. The following pages offer some guidance on how to help your partnerships succeed.



"It's nothing you can point to exactly, but there's a difference in this school. The partnership has really meant a lot."

Nurturing Partnerships

The initiative that leads to a partnership can come from many sources: a principal, parent, teacher, business person, community leader or the program coordinator. Whatever your perspective, you may benefit from the following insights about the life and growth of school-community pairings.

Perhaps the most important point to keep in mind when initiating partnerships is to move slowly—cultivating the unique life and identity of each pair. This is critical because what really makes a difference to a district and its schools is the creation of solid, long-term relationships, not the illusory success of amassing a large, but largely meaningless, list of corporate "supporters."

While every partnership has its own unique character, successful relationships follow a typical pattern of maturation. The checklist below outlines the steps in the development cycle along with some pointers for helping your partnerships to grow.

- Meet with school principals to explain the program and secure expressions of interest. Then contact potential business partners for one or two of the schools. Don't try to start the program system wide immediately.

- In explaining the partnership concept to businesses and schools, stress that it's a program of cooperative activities rather than of monetary contributions to the schools. This will help to avoid misconceptions on both sides. Also, make it clear that businesses should not carry out activities in areas of vested interest, most obviously the distribution of promotional materials. Economics, energy and the environment are additional areas in which for-profit partners may be perceived as having an agenda of self-interest.

- In discussion with company representatives, suggest likely partners from among the available and interested schools. Partners can be matched flexibly—by geographical proximity to company facilities; by congruence of business strengths and curriculum needs (e.g. a Journalism Magnet School or school newspaper club with a local newspaper); or by convenience to the residence of most company employees.

- Secure business approval for a partnership from the chief executive officer. This is essential for ensuring continuing cooperation. Then, ask the company to appoint a business coordinator responsible for developing partnership activities.

- Secure the cooperation of the school principal, then have him or her appoint a school coordinator.

- The program coordinator should encourage the selection of school and business coordinators who are enthusiastic about the program, can motivate colleagues to participate and who can work effectively with people of differing viewpoints. The motivation and leadership abilities of the coordinators will be critical to the partnership's success.

- Meet individually with the school and business coordinators to discuss the program and answer any questions.

- Arrange an informal meeting between the paired coordinators to discuss their hopes for the partnership. Special attention should be given to the following questions: What do the business and school expect from the partnership? What do the coordinators expect from each other? How do the business and school staffs perceive each other?

- Begin publicizing the partnership within the school and the company.

- Encourage a group of interested business people to visit the school and arrange for a reciprocal visit by school staff. Involving as many teachers as possible early in the program is important, since teachers are often in the best position to see school needs and initiate requests for business help.

- Begin planning for partnership activities. Make a "wish list" of needs and brainstorm possible projects making sure to include activities with substantial educational impact. The program coordinator's role as facilitator is especially important during these early planning stages. Typically, business people are reluctant to take the lead in planning for fear of seeming to intrude, while school personnel may be hesitant to seize the initiative.

• Begin with small but visible activities. This gives the partnership a sense of early success and helps to speed the transition from "talking" to "doing."

• While too much time spent just talking can deaden a partnership, planning too many activities too quickly can be equally destructive. Expect partnerships to take about a year to mature. If coordinators are appointed in the early spring, reciprocal tours might be arranged before school ends in June. The planning process may continue during the summer, with small activities scheduled for the fall. By the following spring, the partnership should be established and active.

• Coordinators should talk or meet regularly for ongoing planning and evaluation. A smoothly running partnership requires about one hour of each coordinator's time per week.

• The program coordinator should keep in regular contact with each business and school, providing support, encouragement and ideas.

• Find some simple means of informing the school coordinator, business coordinator and program coordinator about every activity at the partnership. Informally evaluate each activity and review your evaluations after each school term. Some partnerships have also created a form for teachers to use in initiating requests for business cooperation. But, by all means, keep these procedures simple. Too much bureaucracy can stifle the program.

• Use posters, newsletters and visible activities to keep the company and the school aware of the partnership. This contributes to the partnership's sense of identity and helps to generate new ideas. In Lancaster, Pennsylvania, a local advertising agency has contributed time for the development of promotional materials. (Regarding external publicity, it's best to keep a low profile until the partnership is fully established. Otherwise, the effort may be misconstrued as a mere publicity ploy.)

• Stress the individuality of each partnership, but provide opportunities for coordinators to share ideas and experiences with their counterparts at other schools and businesses. An annual reception to honor the coordinators encourages such an exchange and recognizes coordinators for their volunteer efforts.

• Prepare a simple annual report to summarize activity at all the partnerships. It's a good means of sharing ideas, informing contributors about the program and securing future funding support.

Expanding on the Program

Once your partnership program is underway, you can begin to expand on the cooperation it fosters between the community and the schools.

In Pittsburgh, for instance, businesses and foundations have contributed to the Allegheny Conference Education Fund, which has supported a broad range of initiatives—including partnerships—to help reduce the isolation of the public schools from the broader community and to improve public perceptions of the district. One such initiative is a program of small, competitive grants for teachers to carry out innovative projects with their classes. The Allegheny Conference Education Fund has also provided support for public information, has invited prominent educators to present community leaders with issues confronting the public schools, and has assisted the district in securing additional foundation funding.

The Philadelphia Public Schools and that city's business community are cooperating on programs to increase administrative effectiveness, to further a variety of instructional initiatives and to support academic and vocational programs targeted for potential dropouts.

These are only a few of the possibilities. In fact, the avenues for community support for the schools are most limitless.

How to Find Out More

The Pennsylvania Department of Education, in cooperation with the Governor's Private Sector Initiatives Task Force, has established a program to encourage and assist school districts in fostering community-school partnerships. To participate in upcoming workshops, receive materials or just to learn more, write or call:

Pennsylvania Department of Education
Office of Basic Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17108
(717) 787-2127

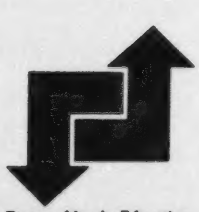
Governor's Private Sector
Initiatives Task Force
Office of Human Resources Committee
of the Cabinet
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17108
(717) 787-6835

For more information on Pittsburgh's Partnerships in Education program, for a handbook on Small Grants for Teachers, or for the Allegheny Conference Education Fund's Five Year Report, write or call:

Allegheny Conference Education Fund
Allegheny Conference on Community
Development
600 Grant Street, Suite 4444
Pittsburgh, PA 15219
(412) 281-1890

The Public Education Fund, a national organization headquartered in Pittsburgh, provides technical assistance and partial funding to organizations creating or strengthening strategically-oriented education funds in communities across the country, particularly in urban areas. For more information on the Public Education Fund, write or call:

Public Education Fund
600 Grant Street, Suite 4444
Pittsburgh, PA 15219
(412) 391-3235



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